

Schwenksville Planning Commission Regular Monthly Meeting

And Joint Meeting with Borough Council

Thursday, February 4, 2021 via Zoom

ROLL CALL

Attendees

H. Gilbert Williams – Chairman

Gary Schneider – Vice-Chairman

Darren W. Rash – Secretary (joined meeting at 7:15 PM)

Jim Caprio- Member

Aaron Holly – MCPC Community Planner

Anne W. Klepfer – Borough Manager (joined meeting at 7:20 PM)

Borough Council Members in attendance

Lee Ann Miller

Sarah Knickerbocker

Darren Rash (joined meeting at 7:15 PM)

Absent: Chris Melville and Mayor Joe Giunta

Revitalization Task Force Members in attendance

Lee Ann Miller

Jon Carro

Heidi Carro

CALL TO ORDER

The Meeting was called to order by Mr. Williams at 7 PM. Saluting the flag was dispensed with.

REORGANIZATION

Chairman – Gary Schneider nominated H. Gilbert Williams to be Chairman. The motion was seconded by Jim Caprio. Nominations were closed. All voted in favor – 3-0 [Williams, Schneider, Caprio].

Vice-Chairman- H. Gilbert Williams nominated Jim Caprio. Gary Schneider seconded the nomination. Nominations were closed. All voted in favor 3-0. [Williams, Schneider, Caprio].

Secretary – Gary Schneider nominated Darren Rash for Secretary. Jim Caprio seconded. Nominations were closed. All voted in favor 3-0. [Williams, Schneider, Caprio].

JOINT BUSINESS

Business Zoning Overlay – Review of Memo by Aaron Holly. Aaron Holly shared his screen and reviewed the Memo dated February 2, 2021. It now includes all parcels in VC-1 and VC-2 Zoning District. Also added parcels zoned Commercial. Suggest adding indoor recreation and movie theater as insensitive eligible uses.

Mr. Williams asked why historic properties are being targeted? He thinks all properties should be target/eligible. Mr. Holly confirmed that the revised Memo now applies the incentives to all VC properties.

Three parking reductions are now included in the draft. Number required can be reduced by the number of on-street parking spaces on main street close to the proposed business. Also, bicycle parking for 8 bicycles can substitute for one parking space. If no on-street parking is available, additional types of parking reductions are proposed for specific uses based on floor area. A provision for the maximum amount of parking that can be reduced may not exceed 50% of the required parking for the specific use.

Mr. Williams asked if this is a proven parking reduction metrics or method of parking incentives? Cheltenham and Norristown use similar reductions. However, he noted that those municipalities may have public parking garages available.

Mr. Williams asked if we can add a graphic/chart that shows the benefit of choosing one of the incentivized uses – show a before and after graphic. We need to illustrate the benefits for people who work under this overlay.

Sarah Knickerbocker suggested that another credit or reduction could be added for securing shared parking agreements with neighboring properties.

Jon Carro – How does the shared parking around the Old Borough Hall and the alley behind it be affected by this. Will there be additional shared parking added?

Anne Klepfer– Mr. Williams is correct, the parking calculated for the Lumberyard as required could possibly be reduced under this overlay which would then open up more of their parking to count as shared parking for other 100 block businesses.

Mr. Williams – having a parking problem is a good thing. It means people are visiting your downtown and frequenting your businesses.

Aaron Holly – there are ways to handle the equity for properties that do not have public parking directly in front of their properties. Could count spaces within a certain distance or across the street from the business.

Guest Brian Pippert asked if a possible incentive could be providing a bus stop in lieu of a parking space. Mr. Williams and Mrs. Klepfer noted that it is unlikely that a bus service will be available in Schwenksville due to the cost. Not sure that kind of credit is feasible right now. Soon there will be autonomous vehicles that reduce the amount of parking required. Aaron Holly noted that zoning isn't static and if bus routes ever come to Schwenksville that credit could be added to the Zoning.

Definitions – Mr. Williams suggested definitions under Artisan definitions for Saddle/Tack Shops, Leathergoods, Smithing, bakeries. Jim Caprio suggested Artisan category should have language that says not limited to and provide a process for approving other uses.

Also, incentives for businesses that leverage the trail or creek such as Outfitters, bike shops, Retail that focuses on trail oriented sales such a pet store, hiking clothes etc.

Brian Pippert -suggested butcher shop, Grocer (Fruits & Vegetables), Creamery etc. like one finds in Europe.

Lee Ann Miller , said that she just was able to review the MEMO for the first time and she's confused why all the incentives aren't being applied to all businesses. She says the town needs businesses period –not just some business. She thinks they should be applied to everyone.

Mr. Williams asked where did this Business Overlay Ordinance come from? He thought the idea for the ordinance came from the Revitalization Task Force.

Lee Ann Miller said the Memo and the concept came directly from the Planner at the request of the Borough Manager. Mrs. Klepfer clarified that the concept came from a staff meeting with a Council Member and then a conversation with the Planner.

If Council or the Planning Commission wants to apply incentives to all businesses then the Borough should amend the base zoning not create an Overlay District. The Borough just finished a revision and update to the Zoning Ordinance, the idea behind this Overlay was not to change the new Zoning Ordinance.

Lee Ann also pointed out that the uses may change after parking is arrived at with the incentive. How will that issue be addressed? How would this work with a mixed use? It seems to get very complicated.

Mr. Williams asked the other Planning Commission members if they have discussed this draft Overlay Concept sufficiently and if they are ready to move it on to Borough Council and let them decided whether or not they want to expand the scope of it or change it to an amendment to the base zoning.

Gary Schneider, Jim Caprio, Darren Rash were all in favor of moving it on to Borough Council to review.

Jim Caprio suggested that the Overlay be something the Planning Commission and Borough Council review annually. Darren Rash believes that the Zoning Ordinance was thoroughly reviewed and thought to be appropriate.

Lee Ann believes potential renters and property owners will not be willing to seek or pay for an expensive hearing for zoning relief for the location, they will simply move on to another location.

Mr. Williams asked Aaron Holly for some insight on how other communities have handled the change in use for properties next to other uses or residential uses. Are their appropriate metrics that govern hours of use, lighting, noise, and other peace and good order issues. Mr. Holly said that typically those items are regulated in the base zoning which would still apply for uses under the Overlay District.

Lee Ann Miller suggested that some of the uses be made Conditional Uses. Mrs. Klepfer noted that would entail a \$500-\$1000 fee for a hearing. The costs are advertising hearing and having a court stenographer.

The Planning Commission reviewed some minor adjustments to the Memo. Mr. Williams reviewed his notes; On Street Parking Section—possibly expand it, tweaks to the uses and “including but not limited to”, distances to on-street parking (currently at 100’). **Action:**

Jim Caprio moved to recommend adopting the Business Overlay District as outlined in the Memo of February 2, 2021 with adjustments. Darren Rash seconded it, all in favor, 4-0.

LERTA – Mrs. Klepfer explained how the Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance Act works. That it pertains to improved properties and the how the increase in tax assessment is implemented. The Borough can choose five years or ten years. The borough still collects the base tax assessment (pre-improvement assessment).

Revitalization Plan - The Task Force is poised to review the 2010 Revitalization Plan. It was supposed to start in 2020 but it got derailed due to the Pandemic. The RTF would welcome the Planning Commissions input on the elements of the plan, new elements or to revise the elements. Mrs. Klepfer will make sure the Planning Commission gets a copy of it.

REGIONAL PLANNING NEWS

Also, the Regional Planning Commission has been made aware that the Renninger tract in Lower Frederick Township, Perkiomen Township and Schwenksville Borough has been sold to a developer. Stormwater in this drainage corridor is a major regional issue. The County is opening up communications with the developer and is also pushing to get a regional grant application for a flood mitigation/drainage study.

There is a Meeting February 15th on Zoom where the Developer will attend to introduce themselves and the affected municipalities will be there as well. They are hoping that that they can negotiate a multi-municipal stormwater study to be paid for by the developer and perhaps grant money as well as a Traffic Study. Hopefully everyone will learn more about why sort of density the Developer is hoping to get, where the water and sewer will come from and what impact studies will be required.

Senator Mensch said signs will be going up on Plank Road and Township Line Road regarding signage for trucks.

BOROUGH NEWS AND UPDATES

The Borough just received the ADA Ramp Plan from PennDOT for Main Street and the ramps they are installing will be coordinated with the ones the Borough is installing as part of the TA Set Aside program.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Brian Pippert, a member of the Schwenksville Borough Authority attended Stormwater Management Training and he volunteered to share the PowerPoint presentations he received at the workshops. He will provide them to Mrs. Klepfer to share with Planning Commission and Council.

MEETING MINUTES

Action on January Meeting Minutes deferred until March Meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

SALDO Parking Lot Requirements – Deferred until Next Month.

Sidewalk Map - - Available for use with grant applications.

ADJOURNMENT

By Motion of Darren Rash. and second by Gary Schneider, Planners voted 4-0 to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 PM.